USDA Foreign Agricultural Service
GAIN Report
Global Agricultural Information Network

Voluntary _ Public

Date: 1/28/2014
GAIN Report Number: HK1405

Hong Kong

Post: Hong Kong

Molluscs Found with Arsenic Exceeding Hong Kong Level

Report Categories:
Agriculture in the News
Fishery Products
Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

Approved By:
Erich Kuss
Prepared By:
Caroline Yuen

Report Highlights:

The media tested molluscs samples drawn from retail outlets on their arsenic concentration so as to evaluate food safety associated with the consumption of shellfish products. Samples included geoduck and mussels from major supplying countries - the U.S. , China and Canada. Test results showed that samples from the U.S. and Canada contained arsenic levels exceeding Hong Kong's standard. Following the release of test results, a Legislative Council member urged the Hong Kong government (HKG) to strengthen its monitoring of food safety with respect to seafood products. The media conducted the tests subsequent to China's recent suspension of shipments of bivalve molluscs from FAO Area 67 (North West Pacific) due to finding of violative Paralytic Shellfish (PSP) toxin in a shipment of geoduck clams from Alaska and high inorganic Arsenic in a shipment of geoduck clams from Washington State. Trade in Hong Kong is normal but increased inspection/testing rate is expected.

The news that China has suspended shipments of bivalve molluscs from northwest coast of the U.S. due to the finding of violative Paralytic Shellfish (PSP) toxin in a shipment of geoduck clams from Alaska and high inorganic Arsenic in a shipment of geoduck clams from Washington was reported in Hong Kong. The news has raised the public's concern for the safety of consuming shellfish products, which are very popular seafood items for hot pot dishes in winter. A local newspaper then drew ten molluscs samples with different country of origin from different retail outlets and tested them on their arsenic concentration. These samples included geoduck and mussels supplied from Canada, China and the U.S. which are major supplying countries of these products to Hong Kong. Test results showed that a U.S. and a Canadian sample had arsenic levels of 12.2 ppm and 16.5 ppm respectively. Both samples had arsenic levels exceeding Hong Kong's standard. The table below shows the test results. According to Hong Kong's Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations, the maximum permitted concentration of arsenic (AS_2O_3) in shellfish and shellfish products is 10 parts per million.

Table 1: Test results of arsenic concentration in shellfish products

Sample	Country of Origin	Arsenic (ppm)
Frozen mussel	U.S.	9.4
Frozen mussel	U.S.	**12.2**
Frozen geoduck	China	0.7
Chilled geoduck	U.S./Canada	6.7
Chilled geoduck	China	4.1
Frozen geoduck	China	0.5
Frozen mussel	Canada	0.4
Frozen mussel	Canada	**16.5**
Frozen geoduck	Unknown	1.9
Frozen mussel	Unknown	0.5

Source: Oriental News, January 22, 2014

The HKG is under pressure to step up its monitoring measure on the safety of imported molluscs in the light of the test results and the trade suspension imposed by the Chinese authority. In response, the HKG indicated that the Center for Food Safety tested on 1500 molluscs samples (including geoduck) for metallic concentration (including arsenic) between January 2012 until November 2013. All test results were satisfactory. However, they pledged that they will step up surveillance.

Reportedly, the trader of the U.S. frozen mussel in question has withdrawn the products from the market following the testing commissioned by the media. However, he indicated that the shipment had obtained a health certificate from the U.S. health authority before being exported to Hong Kong.

Trade of shellfish products continues as normal but the industry is expecting increased inspection and testing rate for shellfish products particularly those originate from the northwest Pacific coast.

Currently, the importation of seafood products to Hong Kong does not require any health certificates. In practice, most importers ask their suppliers to provide them with health certificates in order to expedite customs clearance and facilitate marketing. Also, many seafood products imported to Hong Kong are re-exported to China and Macao and these two places require mandatory certification. Therefore, most seafood imports to Hong Kong are accompanied by health certificates though not legislatively required by the HKG.

Between January and November 2013, Hong Kong imported a total of $764 million worth of molluscs to Hong Kong. Over 74 percent of the molluscs imports by volume are re-exported. The U.S. is the third largest supplier accounting for 10 percent of the market share at a value of $76 million. Popular items include clams, geoduck, oyster, mussels, and scallop.

Table 2: Hong Kong Molluscs Imports in US$

Year To Date: January – November							
Partner Country	**United States Dollars**			**% Share**			**% Change**
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2013/2012**
World	1,058,498,506	649,676,770	763,602,429	100.00	100.00	100.00	17.54
China	102,496,057	150,593,925	245,774,583	9.68	23.18	32.19	63.20
Japan	434,767,048	157,628,558	174,434,259	41.07	24.26	22.84	10.66
United States	**111,407,066**	**84,436,726**	**76,720,210**	**10.53**	**13.00**	**10.05**	**- 9.14**
Canada	73,318,074	55,463,808	57,193,292	6.93	8.54	7.49	3.12
Australia	63,850,011	46,133,264	43,601,241	6.03	7.10	5.71	- 5.49
South Africa	29,860,524	30,774,970	37,752,056	2.82	4.74	4.94	22.67
New Zealand	11,565,746	12,289,660	12,897,260	1.09	1.89	1.69	4.94

Source: Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department

Table 3: Hong Kong Molluscs Imports from the U.S. in US $

Year To Date: January - November								
		United States Dollars			**% Share**			**%Δ**
Commodity	**Description**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**13/12**
0307	Molluscs Live Fresh Etc; Smoked; Flours	111,407,066	84,436,726	76,720,210	100	100	100	-9.14
030791	Molluscs, Live, Fresh Or Chilled,	42,354,532	40,914,934	46,062,192	38.02	48.46	60.04	12.58
030799	Molluscs, Including Flours, Meals And Pellets Of Molluscs,	41,433,390	11,523,859	7,999,432	37.19	13.65	10.43	-30.58
030711	Oysters, Live, Fresh Or Chilled	0	8,216,522	5,685,733	0	9.73	7.41	-30.8
030729	Scallops, Frozen, Dried, Salted Or In	7,285,013	5,902,420	5,646,274	6.54	6.99	7.36	-4.34

	Brine							
030771	Clams, Cockles And Ark Shells, Live, Fresh Or Chilled	0	7,999,026	4,159,659	0	9.47	5.42	-48
030719	Oysters, Other Than Live, Fresh Or Chilled	0	3,060,789	3,187,992	0	3.62	4.16	4.16
030789	Abalone, Other Than Live, Fresh Or Chilled	0	2,223,987	2,727,163	0	2.63	3.55	22.62
030731	Mussels , Live, Fresh Or Chilled	3,259,799	3,406,369	760,884	2.93	4.03	0.99	-77.66
030739	Mussels (Mytilus Spp., Perna Spp.), Frozen, Dried, Salted Or In Brine	464,419	295,208	294,191	0.42	0.35	0.38	-0.34
030749	Cuttle Fish And Squid, Frozen, Dried, Salted Or In Brine	4,019,978	608,147	133,770	3.61	0.72	0.17	-78
030760	Snails, Other Than Sea Snails, Live, Fresh, Chilled, Frozen, Dried, Salted Or In Brine	135,453	60,485	46,092	0.12	0.07	0.06	-23.8
030781	Abalone , Live, Fresh Or Chilled	0	54,145	10,009	0	0.06	0.01	-81.51
030779	Clams, Cockles & Ark Shells, Nesoi	0	1,428	5,393	0	0	0.01	277.61
030721	Scallops, Including Queen Scallops, Of The Genera Pecten, Chlamys Or Placopecten, Live, Fresh Or Chilled	3,229	140,549	1,426	0	0.17	0	-98.99
030759	Octopus, Frozen, Dried, Salted Or In Brine	0	28,857	0	0	0.03	0	-100
030710	Oysters, In The Shell Or Not, Live, Fresh, Chilled, Frozen, Dried, Salted Or In Brine	12,451,254	0	0	11.18	0	0	n/a

Source: Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department